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ABSTRACT

Historian Henry Grady's speeches, particularly one delivered to the New England Club of New York City in 1886, are credited with persuading the North of the South's continued domination of blacks, its need for increased industrialization, and its broadened agriculture. Grady's term "The New South" is defined as a racially conservative, even white supremacist, doctrine designed to convince Northerners to invest in the South. This "myth" of "The New South" during the recovery period projected the image needed for Southern self-identity and for Northern reconciliation. The persuasive qualities of Grady as a publicly identified spokesman spread the idea of "The New South" extensively and "adjusted ideas to people and people to ideas." (CH)

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Harold Mixon

A Re-examination of Henry Grady's New South

At the outset, let me remind you of a major difficulty that always arises whenever we talk about the New South, and that difficulty stems from the variety of meanings attached to the term. It has been used to refer to a chronological period, to a point of view, or to both simultaneously. Perhaps, therefore, it would be well to begin by defining the term as it was used by Henry Grady. For Grady, "the New South" designated a program which promised the solution of the South's economic problems through a combination of industrialization and diversified agriculture. To accomplish this objective, however, the South needed both the good-will and capital of the North, so Grady attempted to demonstrate to the North that the South could be trusted, which involved convincing the North that the South had become a loyal member of the Union; in order to do that, he had to give a satisfactory account of the treatment of the Negro in the South. Finally, Grady had to face a rather unusual problem: he had to promote the idea of an industrialized South which did not differ in any essential respects from the North, while at the same time honoring a romantic, idealized image of the Old South. The New South, so defined, was not unique to Grady; he was only one of many journalists and orators in both the North and South who were ardent advocates of the concept. His significance lay in his identification in the public eye as the Southern spokesman par excellence for the movement.

The speech which launched Grady's national reputation as an orator was the address entitled "The New South," delivered in 1886 to the New England Club of New York City. Enthusiastically received by the immediate audience and by the majority of the press, the speech has nonetheless not been without its detractors. As an example, Paul H. Buck, in The Road to Reunion, suggested that "the content of his speech was a bundle of platitudes made trite by endless repetition," an estimate which the modern reader may well share. It was not until subsequent

CS 500 242

speeches that themes which Grady outlined in New York were to be given substance in specific details. Typical of those speeches was an address which he delivered at the Dallas State Fair in 1887, and it is with that speech that we will primarily be concerned this morning.

It is interesting and significant that Grady began his Dallas speech, not with a discussion of the South's economic situation as he had done in New York, but rather with a statement about the Southern treatment of the Negro. The strategy was a clear recognition of the priorities of his respective audiences, and Grady further indicated the importance of the issue by suggesting that this was the most pressing problem facing the South. He then devoted half of the speech to a consideration of the matter.

According to Grady, there had been no problems between Negro and white until overzealous Northerners had rushed the black man into power without adequate preparation. The result was a large Negro vote which because of the ignorance of the black man was easily purchasable by corrupt and unscrupulous men. Because it was so large, almost equal in number to the white vote, the Negro vote could control the balance of power in the event the white vote divided. Therefore it was necessary to have a solid South in which the collective vote of the white man would always be able to counterbalance the vote of the black man.

All of this may sound as if Grady was addressing himself solely to a political question. However, note the rationale upon which Grady justified his position. The Negro, so held Grady, must be prevented from gaining the dominant position, not just because he was ignorant and easily misled; ultimately the Negro must never be permitted to dominate the white man because such a condition would run counter to "an infallible decree." As Grady expressed it, "the white race can never submit to Negro domination, because the white race is the superior race." Therefore, Grady concluded, "the supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained

forever, and the domination of the Negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards, because the white race is the superior race."

To support his claims for white racial superiority, Grady turned to religious sanctions. "The races and tribes of the earth are of divine origin," he claimed in a passage which might have been lifted with little or no alteration out of the antebellum proslavery apologia, and he added that racial separation was of divine origin, too. In fact, this separation stood as a marker of "God's will." No man should attempt to undo God's work. Unity of civilization was no more possible than unity of faith. "No race," declared Grady, "has risen, or will rise, above its ordained place," and therefore attempts to bridge the differences by statutes were doomed to failure.

A comparison between the positions which Grady took on the racial problem in the Dallas speech and the New York speech reveals some notable contrasts. The New England Club was told of a South which was well on its way toward providing the Negro with an education, accepting him as a useful and productive member of society, and granting him his full rights under the law. In the Dallas speech, attention was focused on the necessity of controlling Negro suffrage on the authority of a theory which assigned the Negro a position of permanent racial inferiority to the white man and decreed a continuing separation of the two races. Critics have suggested that these contrasts can be accounted for on the basis of audience adaptation, and there is really no substantial conflict in Grady's position in the two speeches. Let's assume for the moment that that is the case, and see what happens when we place the two positions side by side. If we lay aside for the moment the question of the factual soundness of Grady's position in the two speeches, and it is a large question, what emerges is a racial philosophy which suggests that treatment of the Negro must always be conditioned by a divine - ly ordained separation of the two races based on the inherent inferiority of the

Negro. Therefore we must assume that when, in the "New South" speech, Grady talked about treating the Negro justly and equitably, he meant treating the black man fairly as a Negro, not as a white man. There is, of course, little new or radical about such a view. at best it might be termed conservative, and measured by other attitudes toward the Negro in Grady's day, for example, the attitude of the Southern Populists, he could even be termed reactionary.

Grady followed his discussion of the South's racial problems with a consideration of the need for industrialization of the South. His development of that point was interesting strategy, for he began, not be attacking, but by praising the post-war economic accomplishments of the South. He asserted that the South had shown remarkable economic recovery since the war. This recovery, according to Grady's analysis, had been due in no small measure to Southern cotton production, a virtual monopoly in which the South stood secure on the world market. However, he also pointed to the growing industries in the South, mentioning the success of the Southern iron industry, the Southern coal industry, and the Southern lumber industry. Grady then asserted that Southern economic growth would continue iffthe South observed two maxims. First, she must remember that no one crop would make a people prosperous, cautioning that "whenever the greed for a money crop unbalances the wisdom of husbandry, the money crop is a curse." The South, he noted, was rapidly learning that lesson, and he pointed to examples to prove his point. However, agriculture alone, no matter how rich or varied in its resources, could not establish or maintain a people's prosperity; thus the second maxim: the South must develope an industrial system for turning its raw materials into finished products. In this respect, too, Grady could see progress in the South.

What Grady proposed was, of course, not new in Southern history. Historians have pointed out that Southern industrialization was more an evolution than a

revolution. In the Old South, manufacturing had existed along with agriculture, and it was subservient to agriculture not because of an agricultural philosophy but because of agricultural profits. Even so, by 1860 the South had 188 cotton mills with a yearly output of $14,000,000, and two-thirds of those mills escaped destruction.

Other industries were also inherited from the Old South. In fact, of the major New South manufactures, only furniture-making was missing in the Old South. So, as Paul Buck has pointed out, "the roots of the movement rested deep in the Southern past." The war had destroyed one of the most serious impediments to the development of Southern industry, i.e., the slave economy, and as C. Vann Woodward has noted, other conditions made the time ripe for industrialization. Grady was therefore in the position of endorsing an almost inevitable development rather than proposing a new departure.

It should also be noted that Grady was advocating an idea popular in both the North and the South. Northern capitalists were more anxious to invest in the South, and there were many indications of Southern interest in the development of industry. He was therefore not faced with the problem of changing peoples' minds ; he was rather intensifying an interest which already existed.

There is a final element of Grady's New South which deserves mention. Like many New South spokesmen, Grady advocated an industrial economy and reconciliation with the North while paying homage to a legendary, romantic image of the Old South. In the Dallas speech, he had a word of praise for the insituttion of slavery even while suggesting that the practice was actually indefensible, arguing that slavery did result "in its wise and humane administration, in lifting the slave to heights of which he had not dreamed in his savage home, and giving him a happiness he had not yet found in freedom." Later in the speech, Grady put the Old South myths to use in support of his contention that a warm and cordial relationship had charac-

terized the dealings of white and black before the war. Like many of his other arguments, this one was also taken directly from the antebellum proslavery apologists.

The reverence for the romantic popular image of the Old South is not as evident in the Dallas speech as in other Grady speeches, particularly in the speech at Augusta. But he used it enough to bear witness to the paradox which C. Vann Woodward has called "the divided mind of the South;" that is, a determination on the part of the South to hold on to a legendary past with one hand and the new industrial economy with the other hand. The use of the theme was effective strategy for Grady, because both the North and the South were interested in the Old South tradition. Woodward and others have demonstrated a growing Northern attachment to the idea of an Old South characterized by leisurely plantation life revolving around gallant men, beautiful women, and trusting, faithful slaves. The North wanted to believe that that kind of South once existed. And, of course, the same myth had a firm grip on the South. By connecting his program with the romantic visions prevalent in both sections, Grady was able to tap an effective means of persuasion.

I have tried to show that rather than being the apostle of a brave, new world Grady was basically conservative, particularly with respect to his racial views. I believe it could also be shown, if time permitted, that Grady often supported his views with specious reasoning based on frequently questionable evidence. Where, then, lay the attraction of his New South idea? Of course, the enthusiasm may be attributable in some degree to Grady's mastery of the technical skills of delivery, a mastery to which his biographers all bear witness. However, that explanation alone cannot account for the acceptance which his speeches received. One of the more interesting rationales for that acceptance developes from a way of looking at the New South suggested by a number of historians, but perhaps developed most

fully by Paul Gaston. In The New South Creed, Gaston suggests that the New South concept be viewed as a myth. By "myth", Gaston refers not to a polite euphemism for a falsehood, but to a combination of images and symbols that reflect a people's way of perceiving truth. Mark Schorer has pointed out that myth so defined serves a valuable societal function, in that it gives unity and meaning to experience. Such was the case with Grady's New South myth. The Seattle Post characterized Grady's "New South" speech as "the right word spoken at the right time," and perhaps that evaluation could be appropriately extended to cover the New South myth as a whole. It was attractive because it projected an image which the South needed and the North wanted. The post-Civil War South had subsisted heavily on myths to which it turned for the recovery of pride and self-esteem. In Grady's heyday, the attractiveness of some of those myths was beginning to wane, particularly for the rising generation of Southerners. The New South concept added still another myth which gave Southerners a self-identity which they needed.

For the North, the New South myth provided a justification for reconciliation with the South. Northern capital wanted to invest in the South, and there is every indication that the North had tired of the agitation over the treatment of the Negro. In fact, as Rayford Logan has detailed in his The Betrayal of the Negro, Northern opinion of the Negro was becoming more and more closely assimilated to Southern thinking on the subject. The New South myth presented a picture of the region which was acceptable to the North.

It was suggested earlier in this paper that Grady's function was more hortatory than persuasive, i.e., he was in the position of building enthusiasm for an attractive id ea. Some time ago, I discussed this conclusion with our chairman, and he reminded me of Donald Bryant's definition of rhetoric as being the function of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas. I can think of no more appropriate description of Grady's rhetorical function with reference to the New South concept, or any better explanation for his success.